Wetland Communities in Indiana

(Based on Natural Community Classifications, IDNR, Division of Nature Preserves.)

Acid bog (shrub/herb bog) -an acidic wetland of kettle holes in glacial terrain. Consists of low shrubs and mosses such as sphagnum. The bog can also be a floating, quaking mat. These systems have non-flowing or very slow flowing water that fluctuates seasonally.

Acid seep - a bog-like wetland that is groundwater-fed and located in upland terrains. It is characterized by flowing water during at least part of the year. It is naturally irrigated by the outflow of groundwater.

Circumneutral seep (seep-spring) -a groundwater-fed wetland on organic soils and is primarily herbaceous with a scattered tree canopy. Typically it is situated on the lower slopes of hills, particularly those bordering larger drainages. It is characterized by slowly flowing water during at least part of the year and is naturally irrigated by the outflow of groundwater.

Circumneutral bog (scrub bog) -a bog-like wetland that receives groundwater. These bogs can sometimes be found as a quaking or floating mat. The soils are usually peat or other low nutrient organic substrates, which are saturated and neutral to slightly acid. These systems have non-flowing or very slow flowing water that fluctuates seasonally.

Fen -calcareous, groundwater-fed wetlands. They are often a mosaic of grassy areas, sedgy areas, grass-sedge areas, and tall shrub areas. These systems have very slow flowing water in which the water level fluctuates seasonally.

Flatwoods -a forest on level upland terrain characterized by a mosaic of wet depressions and slightly elevated soils. Different types of flatwoods are differentiated by substrate and/or vegetation and/or geography (e.g., sand flatwoods, post oak flatwood, boreal flatwoods, and central till plain flatwoods). Soils are typically poorly drained. Water levels, an accumulation of direct precipitation (not flooding), are normally ephemeral above the soil surface.

Forested swamp-a permanently inundated wetland of large river bottoms. They normally occur in depressions and sloughs of the bottomlands. The soils are usually very poorly drained and is seasonally to permanently saturated or ponded.

Forested fen -a tree-dominated wetland on organic soil which receives groundwater. They are often a mosaic of tree areas, tall shrub areas, and herbaceous areas.

Gravel wash -a plant community occurring on gravely substrates along streams and rivers. Ground cover consists of mixed herbs, grasses, and vines with shrubs present at times. These communities are subject to brief but severe flooding.

Lake - a natural standing water body larger than four acres. Lakes have temperature stratification, and may have beaches formed from wave action. These communities have plant mosaic patches that correlate with water depth and types of substrates. Water levels may fluctuate seasonally, and there is little or no water flow.

Marl beach prairie - fen-like community located on the marly muck shorelines of lakes; the surface is firm and moist but not saturated, and marl precipitation is evident.

Marsh -herbaceous wetland of more or less permanent, non-flowing water bodies, either in lakes or water-filled depressions; water levels may fluctuate, but rarely recede to expose the soil surface.

Muck flat -a shoreline and lake community possessing a unique flora of sedges and annual plants, many of which are also found on the Atlantic and Gulf Coastal Plains. They are situated at the margins of lakes or are covering shallow basins. This system has a peat substrate and may float on the water surface, but during high water periods are usually inundated. The water level fluctuates seasonally or from year to year in response to the amount of precipitation.

Open Water -a wetland of less than 20 acres, the bottom of which has at least 25% cover of particles smaller than stones, and a vegetative cover less than 30%. They lack bottom surfaces large and stable enough for plant and animal attachment. Water regimes are subtidal, permanently and semipermanently flooded, and intermittently exposed.

Panne (calcareous seep) -an herbaceous wetland occupying interdunal swales near Lake Michigan. They are located on the lee side of the first or second line of dunes from the lakeshore. Pannes are naturally irrigated by the outflow of ground water.

Sand flat -a shoreline and lake community possessing a unique flora of sedges and annual plants that resemble those found on the Atlantic and Gulf Coastal Plains. They are found at the margins of lakes or covering shallow basins. This system has a sand substrate and during high water periods are inundated. The water level fluctuates during a season or from year to year in response to the amount of precipitation.

Sedge meadow -sedge-dominated wetland of stream margins and river floodplains, lake margins, or upland depressions. These systems usually occupy the ground between a marsh and upland, or a shrub swamp or wet forest. The substrate of a sedge meadow is typically highly organic, and is at or just above the water level.

Shrub swamp -a shrub-dominated wetland that is more or less permanently inundated. It commonly occurs in depressions. They are characterized by non-flowing or very slowly flowing water which fluctuates seasonally.

Sinkhole swamp -an unusual and small semi-permanently flooded wetland of limestone landscapes. They are located in depressions that were formed when underground chambers dissolved in a limestone plateau and collapsed. The water levels are more or less permanently elevated above the soil surface, but may dry down in drought conditions.

Sinkhole pond -a water-containing depression, generally smaller than four acres, in limestone topography; normally consists of open water and marshy borders with little or no water flow.

Wet prairie -herbaceous wetland that occurs in deep swales; substrates range from very black mineral soils to muck.

Wet sand prairie -herbaceous wetland that occurs in deep swales; substrate is sand (sometimes mixed with muck).

Wet floodplain forest (bottomland hardwood forest) -a broadleaf deciduous forest of river floodplains. It has traits of long flooding and hydric soils that are intermediate between wetlands and terrestrial systems.

Wet-mesic floodplain forest -a broadleaf deciduous forest of river floodplains. A great diversity of tree species is found in these systems as compared to the wet floodplain forest type. These systems have imperfectly and poorly-drained neutral silt loam soils which are poorly aerated. Despite flooding, the soils and flora suggest a terrestrial rather than palustrine system.

Wet-mesic sand prairie -upland herbaceous community dominated by grasses, and occurring in shallow swales or lower slopes of sand plains; substrate is typically sand or loamy sand.